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States to launch 'IT readiness' tool for common assessments

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A new tool will test states' IT readiness as online assessments are implemented.

As two state consortia work to create next-generation common assessments to help make testing more meaningful for students and teachers, a new tool will launch later this month to help states determine how ready their schools are to support a system of online assessments.

The [SMARTER Balanced Assessment Consortium](#) ^[2] (SBAC) and the [Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers](#) ^[3] (PARCC) have awarded a contract to Pearson to develop a new "Technology Readiness Tool" to support states as they transition to the next-generation assessments, which are based on the Common Core state standards.

SBAC and PARCC both received grants from the federal Race to the Top program to work with states to create next-generation, comprehensive testing systems. The development of the Technology Readiness Tool is one component of their initiatives to establish infrastructure and content for delivering common assessments online.

Intended to launch March 20, the tool was developed using open source technology. Data will be collected from states twice annually through 2014 to provide updated information about their technology and infrastructure readiness, and this information will be shared with state education stakeholders. Data will be compared against minimum and recommended requirements, and the application will support progress tracking.

See also:

[Tips for making the move to online assessments](#) ^[4]

[Report tracks states' progress toward Common Core standards](#) ^[5]

The new tool, with backing from the State Educational Technology Directors Association (SETDA), will support state education agencies as they work with local education agencies to determine any technology and infrastructure upgrades that might be necessary to prepare for the new online assessments, which are expected to be launched by the two consortia in the 2014-15 school year.

Already, some education leaders [have expressed concerns](#) ^[6] about the educational technology infrastructure that will be necessary to deliver the tests online.

Both consortia are working with their member states to develop next-generation online assessments that align with the new Common Core State Standards and accurately measure student progress toward college and career readiness. Use of the tool will allow schools to capture and report key readiness indicators, including the number and type of computers they have, their network and bandwidth infrastructure, staffing, and other resources.

"Navigating any type of educational change is a complicated process, and the move to online assessments brings with it great opportunities and unique challenges," said Laura Slover, senior vice president at Achieve, which is the project management partner for PARCC. "Both test consortia are focused on providing the tools and resources to remove any potential roadblocks for states as they move through the transition process."

Besides developing the Technology Readiness Tool, Pearson has released a [Roadmap to 2014](#) [7] that outlines key steps in a successful transition to online assessments, such as conducting a needs analysis, developing a realistic transition plan, ensuring interoperability, and communicating proactively.

The assessments

The SBAC assessment is a computer-adaptive set of technologies that advocates say will allow for increased precision. As a student takes the assessment, the test engine will constantly upload new questions based on the student's answers—if the student answers a question incorrectly, the computer would generate a different question than if the student answered the previous question incorrectly.

The aim of the Technology Readiness Tool is to "understand what exists in your schools today," said Susan Gendron, policy coordinator for SBAC. This includes educational technology resources such as operating systems, bandwidth, staffing, infrastructure, and other requirements for tablets, laptops, and PCs.

See also:

[Tips for making the move to online assessments](#) [8]

[Report tracks states' progress toward Common Core standards](#) [9]

Pilot and field tests of the SBAC assessment will help researchers improve the technology used to support it. A more comprehensive test will include more and more component integration, and the full system will be thoroughly quality-controlled in advance of the 2014-15 timeframe, Gendron said.

The PARCC assessment design includes two required summative components that come closer to the end of the school year. Those will provide data for accountability purposes and will measure the full range of standards and performance. The design also includes two interim optional assessments.

The system will be field-tested "in earnest" in the spring of 2013, Slover said.

The goal of the collaboration will be "to identify where states are in their infrastructures, and what the gaps are to help them chart a path forward," she said.

PARCC also is creating Educator Leader Cadres, which are cadres of K-16 educators across all PARCC member states. Participating educators will receive deep training on the Common Core state standards and intensive training on PARCC's assessment system. The cadres will launch this summer, with a goal of helping each state increase its capacity to deliver professional development, communications, and engagement around PARCC assessments and the Common Core state standards. Those educators will, in turn, build expertise throughout their states.

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[2] SMARTER Balanced Assessment Consortium: <http://www.smarterbalanced.org/>

[3] Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers: <http://www.parcconline.org/>

[4] Tips for making the move to online assessments:

<http://www.eschoolnews.com/2012/01/18/tips-for-making-the-move-to-online-assessments/>

[5] Report tracks states' progress toward Common Core standards:

<http://www.eschoolnews.com/2012/01/26/report-tracks-states-progress-toward-common-core-standards/>

[6] have expressed concerns: **<http://www.eschoolnews.com../2011/11/29/with-online-testing-on-the-horizon-infrastructure-could-be-a-challenge/>**

[7] Roadmap to 2014:

<http://www.pearsonassessments.com/pai/ai/Products/NextGeneration/Roadmap.htm%20>

[8] Tips for making the move to online assessments:

<http://www.eschoolnews.com../2012/01/18/tips-for-making-the-move-to-online-assessments/>

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